

## VASCO M. TANNER - AN INSPIRING TEACHER

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My first contact with Dr. Vasco M. Tanner occurred during the spring quarter of my freshman year at Brigham Young University. I had registered for "Zoo 11," and Dr. Tanner taught the course, as he did all the other zoology courses offered at that time—since he was "the department." This association was very formal and distant and he was just one of many professors inflicted upon freshman college students.

By the end of this first year of college I was thoroughly confused as to the direction I should take for any future training. I had entered college with the idea of going into chemistry, but two quarters of the subject, in spite of Dr. Maw and his "little flower in the crumpled wall," convinced me that chemistry was just not my thing.

A two-year mission for the Church, accompanied by some reading and much thinking and reevaluating of my interests and abilities, led me to consider a premedical curriculum. This decision was tentative and never actually materialized, but did set the stage for more contact with Dr. Tanner. There was comparative anatomy (I was just a year or two late to have the thrill of seeking out and capturing a stray [?] cat and "refrigerating" it on the window ledge of the zoo lab in the old Education Building), embryology (taught during the spring quarter when there would be an abundance of fertile hens' eggs, since each student had to furnish his own supply), and histology. Although I did not realize it at the time, I was rather definitely committed to zoology by the end of my sophomore year.

"The Doc," as he was affectionately called by those of us who considered him to be our boss, exhibited an enthusiasm in his teaching that affected all of us. No one could soon forget his manual demonstration of the formation of the heart in the chick embryo and the initiation of the heart beat, nor his straight-faced assignment of several pages of outside reading in *each* of a hefty pile of books which he so obviously carried in and deposited on the lecture table as a preamble to his lecture. And we believed him! Well, at least for a while. In some of the more advanced courses (cold-blooded vertebrates, research seminars, etc.), Dr. Tanner used to describe the organization, logistics, and results of some of the early field trips made by him and his students to various parts of the state to study sites and to collect specimens for research. In speaking of a trip to the Henry Mountains area he waxed poetic and quoted: "The night has a thousand eyes; the day but one." I was to appreciate the meaning of the quote some twenty-five years later.

The thing that impressed me most about Dr. Tanner was his willingness to treat a student as an individual and to take the time

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to talk over ideas—biological, philosophical, social, or personal. He made you feel that zoology was an important and fascinating subject and that you could make a contribution to it. As a result of his inspiration and encouragement I left BYU, with an A.B. degree, and entered Duke University to do graduate work.

Three years later, with graduate studies completed, I began to formulate a long-range research project: a comparative histological study of mammalian ovaries. Where could a variety of mammalian genera be obtained to initiate such a study? As I pondered this question, sites such as the Henry Mountains, the La Sals, the Uintas, the West Desert kept coming to mind. So in 1946, about ten years after Dr. Tanner had introduced me to the biological bonanza that existed in the State of Utah and that awaited study, and each year since (with a few exceptions), an annual safari has departed from the Brimhall Building for field trips to various parts of the state: Mt. Timpanogos, Mt. Baldy, the La Sals, Castleton, Dead Horse Point, the Arches, Montezuma Creek, Elk Ridge, Hog Wash Canyon, Cottonwood Wash, Cock's Comb, Brian Head, Puffer Lake, Joy. Bonanza, Strawberry Canyon, Wasatch Plateau, Uinta Canyon, and in 1970 the Raft River Mountains. More material than can be studied in one man's lifetime has accumulated from these trips.

Unfortunately for me, Dr. Tanner has never been able to take part in any of these trips. However, some of his former students and colleagues (Drs. C. Lynn Hayward, Elden Beck, and Doral Allred) initiated me well into the rigors, the rewards, and the joys of getting into the field and studying biology in its natural setting. And on the trip to the Henry Mountains area in 1963, as I looked up from my sleeping-bag into a black sky spangled with a thousand blinking stars, and as I listened to the peaceful biological sounds of the desert, I understood and appreciated Dr. Tanner's quotation: "The night has a thousand eyes; the day but one."

I shall ever be grateful for the interest, encouragement, and ideas that Dr. Tanner gave me while a student at the Y and for the part he played in directing me toward a most satisfying and rewarding career in teaching and research.